DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 038 690 CG 005 239

AUTHOR	Askov, Warren; And Others
TITLE	Developing An Instrument to Assess A Sense of Social Responsibility in High School Students.
INSTITUTION	American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C.; Wisconsin Univ., Madison. Research and Development Center for Cognitive Learning.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	2 Mar 70
CONTRACT	OEC-5-10-154
NOTE	14p.; Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Convention, Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 2--6, 1970
AVAILABLE FROM	Wisconsin Research and Development Center, 1404 Regent Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53706
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.80
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescents, Dropout Characteristics, *Dropout Identification, Dropout Prevention, Males, *Social Responsibility, Students, *Test Construction, *Underachievers, *Youth Problems

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a research program for adolescent boys. Means must be found to make school attractive to students who are close to terminating their education. In this regard, it is important to determine how the potential dropout and underachiever differ from their achieving classmates of equal ability and opportunity. Among these differences are: (1) task persistence, (2) pursuit of high standards, and (3) optimism. The non-competent student may be charged with ambition and reform, but still be unable to respond to environmental cues which might lead to success. This program focuses on specific cues which presumably may lead to successful performance. Social responsibility was assessed by a Social Responsibility Test (SRT). This test was administered to 95 sophomore and 73 senior boys. Only moderate support was obtained for the hypothesis that low social responsibility scores are related to high youth culture scores. Statements regarding the effectiveness of the SRT are limited by: (1) only four of the ten picture sets of the SRT are effective; and (2) clear relationships were found only in the senior sample. (KJ)

ED038690

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

DEVELOPING AN INSTRUMENT TO ASSESS A SENSE OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Warren Askov Joseph LaVoie

and Robert E. Grinder

University of Wisconsin*

A paper read at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association

Minneapolis, 1970

Published by the Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Cognitive Learning, supported in part as a research and development center by funds from the United States Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Office of Education and no official endorsement by the Office of Education should be inferred.

Center No. C-03 / Contract 5-10-154

*Wisconsin Research and Development Center
1404 Regent Street
Madison, Wisconsin 53706

CG005239

In the past decade concern over the problem of the high school dropout has increased markedly. Schreiber, in his Profile of the School Dropout (1968), reports that one student in three drops out of school prior to graduation; that in our 15 largest cities, 60 percent of the students from poverty neighborhoods drop out before finishing high school; and that at least another 10 percent never reach the tenth grade. Added to the problem of the actual dropout, there are numerous potential dropouts and so-called underachievers who have dropped out of school in spirit, if not in fact.

There is growing awareness that attempts to deal with the problem of the potential dropout and underachiever at the high school level are largely ineffective. Even when dropouts are lured back to school, 50-75 percent of the students returning to school leave again (Schreiber, 1968). Usually the habits of the underachiever are well entrenched by the time he reaches high school, and they are difficult to change. Currently, early intervention programs, such as Headstart, which attempt to deal with the antecedents of the problem, appear to be the most hopeful. In the meantime, however, means must be found to make school attractive to students who are close to terminating their education.

In this regard, it is important to determine how the potential dropout and underachiever differ from their achieving classmates of equal ability and opportunity. This is especially

important if we wish to teach and develop attitudes and skills that will be maximally adaptive academically and socially. In order to teach them, we must know what they are. Secondly, we must teach them early enough so that they are operational by the time the student reaches the flux of adolescence when he begins to increasingly make decisions for himself. Toward this end, we have worked on a product research program for adolescent boys which is described in this paper.

Two frequently cited correlates of underachievement and the tendency to drop from school are excessive youth-culture participation and maladaptive styles of thinking. By excessive youth-culture participation, we refer to the fact that for many adolescents the social rewards offered by peers and older friends outside of school are more enticing than the patterns of socialization offered by school, parents and other adults (Grinder, 1967; 1969).

In regard to styles of thinking, Hummel and Sprinthall (1965) and Whitely and Hummel (1965) cite several concepts of Hartmann (1939) to support their suggestion that underachievement is a problem of adaptive-ego-functioning. Whitely and Hummel report the following differences between the TAT responses of 20 superior students and 20 underachieving students: The TAT heroes of superior achievers were judged better than TAT heroes of underachievers to distinguish and choose among appropriate

alternatives to action, to perceive the subtlety of situations and to govern their actions accordingly. Also the TAT heroes of superior achievers more frequently accepted responsibility for their actions and handled conflict in such a way as to satisfy their long range interests. It is interesting to note that no differences were found between the two groups in the frequency of motives and conflicts expressed, but differences were found in the methods and strategies used to cope with needs and presses, and that superior achievers more often constructed a means-end relationship between need achievement and success in the TAT stories they told; i.e. they related effort and sacrifice to success, while the heroes of underachievers magically achieve.

The notion of maladaptive styles of thinking refers to the view that maladaptive behavior is determined by maladaptive constructions of the environment and by inappropriate structuring of choice behavior. Whether one speaks of personal constructs, as does Kelly (1958), of adaptive-ego-functions as Hartmann (1939) and other psychoanalytic theorists have, or of cognitive style, a term which seems to be in vogue currently, there seems to be considerable support for the notion that a strong relationship exists between thought and behavior. The relationship is not a univocal one to be sure, but in the absence of constraints, one might expect considerable corres-

pondence between thought and action.

There has been sufficient research on underachievement and the tendency to drop from school for us to catalog at least some of the characteristics that are present in the competent student that are absent in the less successful student. To summarize briefly, the competent student systematically distinguishes among alternatives, governs impulses, delays gratifications, anticipates future consequences, and is highly accurate in judging passages of time. He demonstrates task persistence, pursuit of high standards, and optimism. Moreover, he attends to social amenities, is cooperative, creates a good impression, and expresses regard for the rights and feelings of others.

We often assume that because we can name these deficiencies which frustrate the noncompetent student, the student can see and correct them also. But as Kelly has argued, our classifications and theoretical constructs may or may not be relevant to our subject's behavior. He states, "Over and over again, it appeared that out clients were making their choices, not in terms of the alternatives we saw open to them, but in terms of the alternatives they saw open to them" (1958, p. 53). The noncompetent student may be charged with ambition and reform, but still be unable to respond to

the environmental cues that would lead a more competent person to successes and rewards.

In the next few minutes, I would like to describe a research project which may bring us closer to classroom reality. Our project has focused on specific cues that presumably may lead to successful classroom performances. We have developed a number of picture sets which center around social responsibility. (It is interesting to note how often the term "responsibility" occurs in discussion of the characteristics of the dropout and underachiever.) Our measure of social responsibility was a specially constructed Social Responsibility Test (SRT). The SRT was derived from the assumption that potential dropouts would be less able to discriminate the cues which would lead to effective behavior than would more competent students. A more complete description of the development and scoring of the SRT is contained elsewhere (Askov, LaVoie and Grinder, 1969), but in the remaining minutes, I would like to discuss it briefly.

The SRT consisted on ten situations each made up of a basic approach-avoidance conflict with five cartoon-like illustrations--each depicting an alternative for resolving or reacting to the conflict--which subjects were asked to rank-order from most to least responsible. The ten pictures

comprising the SRT were developed by posing a conflict to a group of sophomore and junior boys who were selected as potential dropouts on the basis of teacher evaluations and academic achievement. Conflict situations conformed to Miller's (1944) description of a double approach-avoidance conflict; in each case the protagonist must choose between an enticing incentive and fulfilling a responsibility.

I would like to present one of these slides as an example of the stimulus materials which we used. In this slide a boy is shown in conflict over helping his parents with fall house cleaning and going off to play football with friends. The alternatives were arranged in random order. In alternative E, the alternative we considered to be the most responsible, the boy indicates that he will join his friends as soon as he finishes his job. In alternative D, the next most responsible alternative, he tries to enlist his friends' help so that he can finish sooner. At the other end of the scale, we considered alternative B the least responsible. Here he forsakes the task to go off to play football while saying, "This job can wait." Alternative C is only slightly more responsible, but at least the boy indicates that he will finish the job at a definite time, i.e., after the game. Between these two extremes, in alternative A, the boy tries to get his parents to help him

finish sooner so that he can leave. As you can see, the "correct" choices can be designated only in relation to the other alternatives. Thus there are no "right" answers but only ones which vary in degree of correctness in relation to each other.

The ten completed picture sets were shown to 95 sophomore and 73 senior boys at a large urban high school. We had previously obtained two sets of data for these boys--school performance data and scores indicating their interest in youth-culture participation (Grinder, 1967). School performance data consisted of absences, scholastic aptitude, credits toward graduation, and their school program (general or college preparatory). Youth-culture data consisted of seven subscale scores and a total score on a Social Interests Inventory (SII) measuring interest in youth-culture participation (Grinder, 1967).

Grinder reported that all school background variables used in his study of youth-culture interest were related in a consistently intercorrelated pattern of high age in school, high absences, low credits, low scholastic aptitude scores, and likelihood of being in a general rather than a college preparatory program. Each of the variables in this pattern was significantly correlated with low school sports, low adult sponsored activity, low hours of study, and low academic

aspiration. The above pattern of school variables, with the exception of age, was also related to higher scores on every youth-culture scale. Age was significantly related only to high independence assertion.

On the basis of these relationships, we expected that low social responsibility scores would be related to low interest and performance in school and to high interest in youth-culture.

Only moderate support was obtained for the hypothesis that low social responsibility scores are related to high youth culture scores. A total youth culture score was computed and found to be related to a low score on only three of the ten picture sets, but only in the senior sample. Both social responsibility and youth culture scores were found to be related to school performance variables, however. Where significant relationships were obtained, they were in a pattern of low social responsibility scores and high youth-culture scores associated with measures of low interest and performance in school. However, youth culture and social responsibility scores were found to be related to different school variables. High youth-culture scores were related to high absences and lower credits, both measures of interest in school. In contrast, SRT scores were found to be related to lower aptitude scores and a greater likelihood of being enrolled in a general

rather than a college preparatory program. These last two measures are more closely related to ability than to interest.

In summary, although some support was obtained for expected relationships, statements regarding the predictive effectiveness of the SRT are limited by two general considerations: (1) the effectiveness of the instrument is limited to four of the ten picture sets; and (2) although a similar pattern of relationships was found in the sophomore and senior samples, clear relationships exist in the senior sample only. Examination of the four most effective sets reveals certain common factors. Two of the sets involve delaying or limiting rewarding activities with peers to finish duties, and three of these four sets involve varying degrees of adult or parental approval or disapproval. While what all of these sets share in common is open to question, probably a generalized factor of self-direction would be the most inclusive.

In order to determine how the four best sets related to our criterion variables, we computed a number of multiple correlations. As shown in Part A of Table 1, four of the ten picture sets employed as multiple predictors are nearly as effective in predicting total youth-culture scores and scholastic aptitude scores in the senior sample as were all ten picture sets. Both combinations of SRT scores were better

at predicting scholastic aptitude than youth-culture scores were however. As shown in part B of Table 1, when school performance scores were employed as multiple predictors, they better predicted a total of four picture sets ($\underline{R}$ = .57) than a total SRT score ($\underline{R}$ = .45) or a total youth-culture score ($\underline{R}$ = .36).

TABLE 1

Social Responsibility Test Scores and
School Variables as Multiple Predictors of Each Other
for the Senior Sample

Single Scores Used as Dependent Variables	Independent Variables Used as Multiple Predictors	
	(A) Social Responsibility Test Scores	
	Sets 1-10	Sets 2, 3, 4 and 9
Total YC Score	.46	.44
Scholastic Aptitude Score	.57	.53
	(B) School Performance Scores (Age, Absences, Scholastic Aptitude, and Credits Combined as a Multiple Predictor)	
Best Sets Total (Sets 2,3,4,9)	.57	
Total SRT Score (Sets 1-10)	.45	
Total YC Score	.36	

These findings admittedly represent a high degree of post hoc empiricism, and they should be tested employing a different sample in a more closely controlled study, but they do indicate the direction that future research might take.

An important consideration to be made in any subsequent development of the picture sets is the relevance of the conflict situations and the cues incorporated in them can be expected to have for the disaffected student. For example, parties and school success may have significance for a middle-class adolescent but be irrelevant both to the experience and expectations of a less advantaged boy. Kagan (1966) suggests that a child who has experienced chronic failure may enter into a situation with a strong expectation of failure, but minimal anxiety about failure. Generalizing from this assumption, one would expect potential dropouts to view an alternative associated with fear of failure with little anxiety, and as a result consider that alternative as irrelevant to responsibility. This particular conclusion may explain in part the unsatisfactory results we obtained in those picture sets which included fear of failure alternatives. In conclusion, we propose that subsequent research should look beyond the notions of achievement and ability to an examination

of the specific attitudes, values, and cognitive styles which distinguish persisting from non-persisting students.

References

Askov, W. H., LaVoie, J. C., & Grinder, R. E. Cognitive style and social responsibility: An empirical instrument for assessing high school students' sense of responsibility. Technical Report No. 90, Research and Development Center for Cognitive Learning. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1969.

Grinder, R. E. Distinctiveness and thrust in the American youth-culture. Journal of Social Issues, 1969, 25(2), 7-19.

Grinder, R. E. A study of the influences of the father's job and social status on the occupational and social goals of youth: Final report. U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, Bureau of Research. Contract No. OE-5-85-061. University of Wisconsin, 1967.

Hartmann, H. Ego psychology and the problem of adaptation. New York: International Universities Press, 1939.

Hummel, R. & Sprinthall, N. Underachievement related to interests, attitudes and values. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 1965, 44, 388-395.

Kagan, J. Reflection-impulsivity: The generality and dynamics of conceptual tempo. Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 1966, 71, 17-24.

Kelly, G. A. Man's construction of his alternatives. In G. Lindzey (Ed.), Assessment of human motives. New York: Grove Press, 1958, Pp. 33-64.

Miller, N. E. Experimental studies of conflict. In J. McV. Hunt (Ed.), Personality and the behavior disorders. Vol.1. New York: Ronald Press, 1944.

Schreiber, D. (Ed.) Profile of the school dropout. New York: Vintage, 1968.

Whiteley, J. M. & Hummel, R. Adaptive ego functioning in relation to academic achievement. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1965, 12, 306-310.